





Taken from the Five Towns Jewish Times February 21st 2018(Abridged). Following a successful introductory run in 2017, Yosef the Musical returns to the stage for a six-show run at the Master Theater in Brooklyn, NY, from February 24 to March 11. The musical is the original work of writer, composer, and lyricist Zvika Bornstein and his collaborators Gad Elbaz, international Jewish music superstar, who worked on the musical score, and Dr. Stuart Rappaport, who co-wrote the lyrics and script and appears in the musical as Yaakov.

When I heard there is a group of Jewish Israeli and American men who had created a musical about Yosef, it caught my eye as the artistic director of the female Raise Your Spirits Theatre of Gush Etzion (www.raiseyourspirits.org). Our women's troupe has written our own biblical musicals on Esther, Ruth, Noah, Deborah, Avraham, and the daughters of Tzelafchad, interwoven with the commentaries and midrash. The fact that someone across the ocean was also seeking to create high-quality biblical musical theater truly intrigued me.

Based on Torah and commentaries, the modern musical is about the story of Yosef and his brothers and in the tradition, the group says, of the Yosef shpiel. The musical has a 30-member all-male cast and was produced and directed by Bornstein, who has twenty years of experience producing national Broadway tours, concerts, and music videos. The musical team

led by Gad Elbaz, Bornstein, and Yaakov Spadaro and features twenty original songs and a recorded score by an Israeli orchestra. The show balances dramatic moments with comedic ones. The musical has partnered with Chabad, Hidabroot, JCC of Marine Park, Madraigos, New York United, and other corporate sponsors, and is also financed through ticket sales and patrons of the arts.

CARE TO DREAM?



Jewish Community Council of
Marine Park
PRESENTS

Joseph

AN INSPIRING MUSICAL FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY

BASED ON THE STORY OF JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

BOOK & LYRICS BY
ZVIKA BORNSTEIN
STUART RAPPAPORT
STARRING AN ALL MALE CAST

THE MASTER THEATER
1029 BRIGHTON BEACH AVENUE,
BROOKLYN NY

MUSIC OF
GAD ELBAZ
ZVIKA BORNSTEIN

SUN. FEBRUARY 25TH AT 6:30 PM

The following is based on my interview with Zvika Bornstein and additional production information.

What does it mean that your musical is a modern-day Yosef play?

Our musical is a continuation of the Jewish culture tradition of creating and performing a Yosef play, a play on the biblical themes and story of Yosef and his brothers. By continuing this hundreds-of-years-old tradition with a modern approach, we are connecting to the generations before us while sharing a piece of history, both biblical and more recent, with our children.

What drew you to this particular biblical story?

Yosef stood up for the unity of his family. The brothers earlier...lived with such conflict and Yosef tried to put a stop to that. He was an amazing personality. I identify with his bravery and creativity.

Why collaborate and work with Gad Elbaz? What does he bring to the project? Will he perform live during this run?

Gad Elbaz's music reaches today's youth; his music has a lot of soul. I wanted to work with the number-one international musical artist to compose these songs. He will be performing for some shows this run.

What is your personal background?

As a child of Holocaust survivors, I fear the common anti-Semitism and feel the only way we can combat this is by increasing our unity. By creating and performing a modern musical, I am hoping to reach out and start a conversation across the world.

I was born and raised in Israel until I was thirteen and I came to the United States with my parents, who moved to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I went to a whole mix of schools...from the Yeshiva Academy of Harrisburg to Ner Yisrael in Baltimore, later on to Yeshiva University, and to Tisch, NYU, from which I graduated.

I have been producing and directing for the past 20 years and have been involved in over a dozen Broadway national tours. I have also written songs for Gad Elbaz, Dudu Fisher, Lipa, and others. I choreograph Jewish music videos, and I produce and direct concerts for Jewish superstars.

Working in the Jewish entertainment world was always very intriguing to me, even though I've also done a lot of mainstream things as well. But it's certainly important now, being married, Thank G-d, with five kids. It gives me great pleasure to do something like this because I see what this generation is all about and how there is so much influence from the outside. If we don't create appropriate content that's inspiring, whether

it's on video, like the music videos that we work on together, or shows and concerts, then we're going to lose a lot of these kids because there's so much more content out there that's so inappropriate and that they can connect to easily. If you don't have something that can keep inspiring them then you're losing the battle. And because we can't fight it, we have to join it and use the Internet, and use our musical talents to make contemporary sounds, something that this generation can connect to, but with the right messages.

How long did this musical take to create?

We wrote it in a two-month period. We saw great inspiration in writing it; both the music and the lyrics really flowed. It's incredible how everything comes to life when you live it.



Yosef's brothers

Who is the show's target audience?

The show is designed to be universally appealing regardless of age, religious background, and life experience. I have seen audiences of all ages laugh and cry. We all—religious, not religious, parents, children, friends—have conflicts, jealousy, and struggles with our environments and egos, and Yosef addresses these issues through a known story as a catalyst to discussing our sorrows, dreams, and hopes. Parents should take their kids to see *Yosef* because it is an educational, family-friendly show that teaches true values.

How did you and your team design the costumes and scenery?

We designed costumes based on authentic Biblical information and the chapter on Yosef in Biblical Archaeology (2016) by Rabbi Zamir Cohen. An Israeli clothing designer assembled the costumes. Our costumes represent what was worn by the Jewish slaves, and the Egyptian scenery utilizes hieroglyphics and a Middle Eastern setting of palm trees, Egyptian art, desert, tents, and Pharaoh's palace.

What were your greatest challenges along the way?

I would say the first was that when you are trying to portray Yaakov the Patriarch, who is the pillar and the foundation of Israel, as well as portraying Yosef, it's a very big responsibility to portray him in the right way so that you touch who he was as a person, and really bring out his greatness in a script. As much as he suffered throughout his life, with tremendous tests, he still stood above all of them.

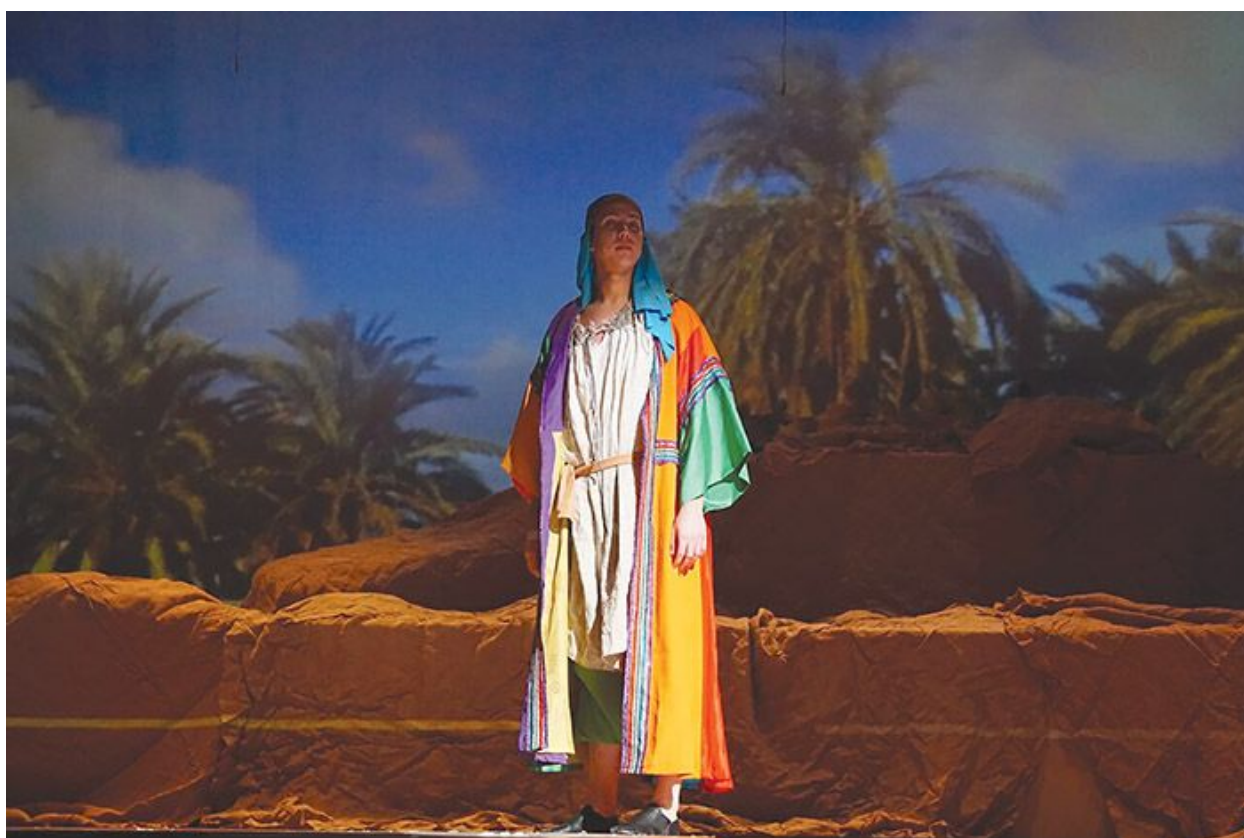
Yaakov is played by Stuart Rappaport, a Five Towns eye doctor who also co-wrote the script and lyrics. He becomes Yaakov, understanding and embodying the role of a challenged, heartbroken father and husband, living with betrayal and loneliness, having lost his beloved wife Rachel and now her son Yosef.

But I think the greatest challenge is to portray the brothers. You're looking at great men and you see what they've done. They were ready

and willing to kill their brother. And to see the descent from where they were to reach that point ... but I wanted to do it from their perspective as well, understanding what their motivation was, and why they would resort to something so unspeakable, and have that discussion among the brothers before they go after Yosef. Shimon is the one who pushed him into the pit. Shimon is talking to his brothers and saying to them, "These dreams ... He wants us to bow down to him." And he's telling them, "He wants to rule over us." For Shimon, these are not just [Yosef's] dreams, these are his aspirations ... and he recalls someone else in his father's family who had similar aspirations—Esav, who wanted to kill Yaakov. He wanted to conquer his inheritance. And his grandfather Yitzchak had his brother Yishmael trying to rule over him. We don't understand this concept, but when you're bowing down to somebody, you're submitting yourself to him. He's now your master. And Yosef's telling them, you're all bowing down to me. And then he takes it a step further and says, not only are you bowing down to me, but our father is also bowing down to me. Our father and mother are bowing down to me. And the brothers see it as a dangerous thing that he's not just an innocent kid, that this is something that will turn into something else in the future and he's going to come after them.

What was the high point along the way?

The high point was sitting with a blank screen every night and then at the end of the night having written a song and a scene. And then at the end seeing everything just come. And from the screen on to the stage was a dream come true, when you see it and you have the actors and you mold it. It's one thing to be a scriptwriter and another to be a scriptwriter and a director, because you can direct it the way you wrote it, so it's interpreted exactly how you wanted it to be.



Yosef

Another high point was the fact that many people came over to me and to other cast members after the show and told us that they'd seen the show twice, three times, and four times. To me that was mind-boggling

because even a show that I love I go to see once. And here people would see the show night after night after night and they brought back more family and friends, because they were so inspired by it, and they wanted others to have the same experience.

How is it to collaborate?

When you have two people working on something you can really put your ideas together. It's not always easy. Many times I had to explain why I'm thinking this way and it gave me more insight. Regarding the music, it was very rewarding to have Gad Elbaz ... It was fun doing this together and coming up with these amazing songs, Thank G-d. Not us in any way. And everything I've seen in my life since then, I see Yosef everywhere I turn.

Did you encounter any dilemmas regarding quoting Bible and your artistic vision?

Yes. Not just the Bible but the actual text of the Torah. You know the story of Potiphar's wife. The Torah doesn't mince words. It tells you exactly what happened and how it happened. This is a family show, so I had to do like Disney does, with multiple levels of understanding, so kids will look at it with one level of understanding and adults will understand it in a different way. We did not have women on stage so I gave Potiphar

this bumbling fool of a character, a servant, like in Beauty and the Beast, where you have Gaston and LeFou. This is a LeFou character, or Abu in *Aladdin*. Our character is actually named Abu, and he sings a song that tells the story of Potiphar's wife without having anyone on stage. Yet he does it in a comical way....For kids it's just a fun show whereas adults or teenagers can understand more of the song in depth.

What reactions have you received following the first run and since then from your community? From audience members? From non-Jews?

The audience was crying, laughing, and learning from the musical. It was everything I had dreamed of and more. My cast fed on the audience's excitement and elevated the musical every night and the audience couldn't have enough—hence a second run and many more.

It's a human story, one of the great epic Biblical stories of love, hope, betrayal, and families. A rags-to-riches story in which Yosef became the second-in-command and rose to power to save the nation. A classic adventure with a modern twist.

What does your family think of the musical? How did they react to the initial idea?

They love the musical and are very proud of me. They sing the songs all the time and are my biggest fans.

How does Yosef's family compare to today's Jewish families and current and common conflicts?

Today's nuclear families, some with two parents, some with divorced and remarried parents, can relate to the conflict among siblings, among half siblings. The complexity of the family politics [in Yosef] mirrors what many of our families live and struggle with, and the humanity of that is refreshing and comforting.

How did the creation of this musical and its upcoming and past performances affect and influence you as a Jew?

I am now a more knowledgeable Jew having learned this story in depth. It helps increase my spirituality and my sense of purpose, particularly in sharing this musical with my audiences and my community.

What is the mission of Yosef the Musical?

To increase unity and pride by elevating the arts to an educational purpose.

What is the long-term plan or goal for the musical?

I'm hoping for a national tour, Miami, Los Angeles, and perhaps countries like Mexico, Israel, and England.

What are your plans for the future?

Please G-d, I'd like to continue to write more musicals. One that we already started writing is the story of Yonah, which is also a very intriguing story. It's a short story, but there's a lot of depth inside that story as well, about the concept of repentance and forgiveness and I think that that's a very strong message especially in our days. The story of Yosef was a story of unity and how Yosef stood above the conflict and united his brothers, particularly at a time they were immigrants in the new land of Egypt, which for a period, at least, was a haven. And the story of Yonah is a story of forgiveness. Those are the two great aspects that we need specifically in our days with everything that's going on around us.